GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:6788
ANSWERED ON:10.05.2000
PERSPECTIVE PLAN FOR SAARC COUNTRIES
SAHIB SINGH VERMA

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any perspective plan for further development of SAARC countries;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the time by which it is like to be prepared and finalised?

Answer

MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

(SHRI AJIT KUMAR PANJA)

(a) The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has not adopted a SAARC Perspective Plan for th development of SAARC countries. Each country independently formulates its own national plans as per its sovereign prerogative. However, the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP), set up by the 9th SAARC Summit in Male (May 12-14, 1997) to review the functioning of SAARC and provide a Perspective Plan for regional cooperation up to the year 2020submitted its Report to the 10th SAARC Summit at Colombo (July 29-31, 1998).

(b) & (c) The GEP`s recommendations focused on a time bound plan for regional economic integration, including (1) negotiation of a Treaty for a South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) by 1999, with implementation by 2008 for all SAARC Members and 2010 fo SAARC LDCs, (2) establishing a SAARC Customs Union, with harmonisation of external tariffs by 2015, and (3) a SAARC Econom Union, with harmonisation of monetary and fiscal policies by 2020. The GEP recommended special measures for the Least Developed Countries to enable them to adjust to a Free Trade Area.The GEP also recommended the adoption of a Social Charter for SAARC, incorporating social welfare targets in the social sector.SAARC leaders at the 10th SAARC Summit at Colombo held ir July 1998 accepted two of the GEP`s main recommendations -
(i) negotiation of a Treaty for SAFTA and
(ii) the adoption of a SAARC Social Charter. The leaders agreed to set up a Committee of Experts for drafting a Comprehensive Treaty Regime for SAFTA by 2001. The First Meeting of the Committee of Experts was held on July 15-17, 1999, in Kathmandu at which its Terms of Reference were agreed upon. The second meeting is scheduled to be held in Kathmandu on mutually agreed dates. An Intergovernmental Expert Group is also proposed to be set up to commence work on the Social Charter.